

SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS

Introduction

Most children are born into this world healthy. The first feeding is a major metabolic event in human life. This is the first test of whether the infant can turn food into fuel. Almost always, everything works as it should. Nutrition and health are off to a good start.

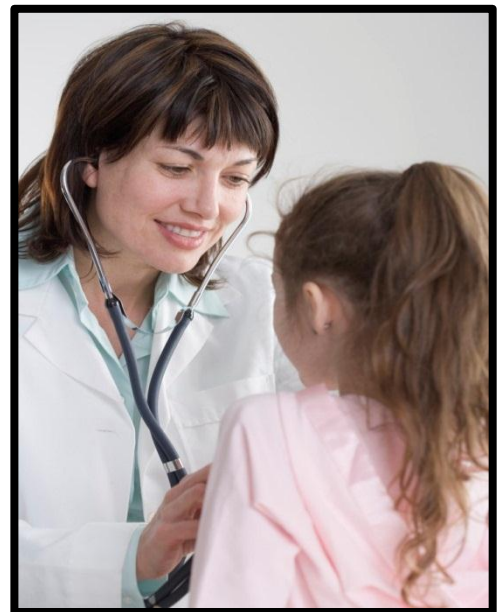
Many of the newborn screening tests done at birth are dietary-related tests. These tests confirm that the infant has the metabolites it needs to use carbohydrate, protein and fat.



As the infant's grows in size and its stomach becomes larger, the amount of time between feedings becomes gradually longer. As time passes, and if no physical or environmental issues arise, the child begins to adapt to the eating patterns of his or her family and community.

Reference Materials

1. [*Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children, Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, June 2013*](#)
2. [*Independent Child Care Centers, A Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbook, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, May 2014*](#)
3. [*Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations, Revised December 2014*](#)
4. [*MT CACFP 2002-4 Rev 3, Food Allergies and Intolerances, Revised July 1, 2014*](#)



Examples of Special Dietary Needs

Special dietary needs can be any, or more than one of these things:

- Disability or not
- Medical or not
- Proven or suspected
- Inherited or not
- Treatable or not
- Preventable or not
- Visible or not
- Requires substitute food or not
- Mild or severe
- Singular or compound
- Common or rare
- Temporary or life long

Special dietary needs are not easy to define. Sometimes several special dietary needs exist at the same time.

Safety First

Safety is the first and most important consideration with regard to any food to be fed to a child, or any special dietary need. Severe food allergy is a medical condition with life-threatening issues, and requires a special meals and accommodations. Recognizing foods likely to cause an allergic reaction and the signs and symptoms of such a reaction, is important. Learning about, and preparing to respond in case an allergic reaction occurs, is important for all child care staff. In USDA's new [*Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children, Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*](#), Supplement B: Care for Children with Food Allergies on pages 81-87, is an excellent summary of this topic. Please study this document to prepare for an emergency of food allergy, if it occurs.

Responsibility for Special Dietary Needs

Parents are overall responsible for the feeding of their children. When they enroll their child into child care, they entrust this responsibility to their child care providers. If the child has special dietary needs, parents give providers the information and instructions about how their child is to be fed. Parents are always right. Parents are right even when they are wrong. In most cases, a parent's decisions are safe and developmentally appropriate for their child. In extreme cases in questions of safety, legal processes are used to decide.

When problems arise with a child's health, most parents will accept referral to a health provider. If a referral is not possible or not agreed to, then a provider might contact their local child care licensing authority or a county health or tribal health authority to report the concern.

Assessing and treating special dietary needs is the work of health professionals. Each child and family is different. Realizing this is important so that you can leave to health professionals what you do not know yourself.

If there is something unusual in the information the parents give about their child, ask the parents for clarification. If there is something new or unusual with child's behaviors of eating at the child care center, be ready to inquire or inform the parents, or if an emergency, then follow the emergency protocol. Be willing to keep notes of the new information received, steps taken and the persons contacted

The CACFP Meal Pattern

The CACFP Meal Pattern is designed to meet the normal nutritional needs of children in normal health. Since the nutrient needs of normal healthy infants and children are similar, a singular meal pattern can be used to meet those needs. In the State of Montana, the CACFP Meal Pattern is adopted by reference as the required guidance for meal services in all licensed child care facilities.



The CACFP Meal Patterns considers the needs of children of all ages 0-18 years, of all incomes, cultures and locations across the country. The CACFP Meal Pattern can be met with a wide variety of foods, and can be met in a wide variety of circumstances such as varying knowledge, skills and abilities of food service managers, cooks and staff, different markets for food, different kitchen space and equipment, and the varying distances between kitchens and dining rooms.

Enrolled child participants with special dietary needs are included in the CACFP the same as all other enrolled children. A child care center should not create worry or threaten parents with losing their CACFP program benefits due to the special dietary needs of their child.

Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations

A new form named Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations for the CACFP (hereafter referred to as the “form”) is now available and posted on the [CACFP website](#). This form was revised in December 2014 to match a recent new prototype form from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. The old Special Dietary Statement form is now gone, it has been removed from the CACFP website.

The new form lists three categories of special dietary need:

- Participant has a disability or medical condition and requires special meals and/or accommodations.
- Participant does not have a disability, but is requesting a special meals and/or accommodations due to food intolerance(s) or other medical reasons.
- Participant does not have a disability, but is requesting a special meals and/or accommodations.

The CACFP form titled *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodation* is made available by the State agency for center’ staff to give to parents to help them communicate and declare to the center whether the CACFP participant has a disability or not. However, this form is not required by USDA or by State agency. A center’s own form can be used to accomplish the same purpose. Any form or written declaration that contains the information from a physician sufficient to determine if a disability exists that requires special meals and/or accommodation, can be used. In some cases, the CACFP form might be used with additional information affixed to it.

The CACFP form identifies a disability that requires special meals and/or accommodation. This form would not be suitable for use to declare a disability of another kind, such as a hearing loss.



In all cases of a disability requiring special meals and/or accommodations, the name and signature of a licensed physician is required and the parent or guardian's signature in addition.

The burden of proof of a participant's disability is with the parent and the physician, and not with the center. If there is no documentation, or insufficient documentation by a physician of a disability requiring special meals and/or accommodation, then the center is not required to provide the special meal and/or accommodation to the participant.

Any and all signed forms and documents that describe a disability and a special meal or accommodation associated with it, must be kept

confidential by the center. Only staff that need to know of the disability or the special meal or accommodation, are allowed to know. In some cases, parents may want certain additional staff or all staff at the center to know about the disability of the participant and the special meals or accommodation required. In these cases, the center should obtain the parent's permission for this communication in writing, and the center should follow the parent's instructions.

For requests for fluid milk substitutions for a child without a disability or medical condition, a parent or legal guardian's signature on the form is acceptable. This request and this signature can be written on a separate paper, is also acceptable.

Special meals and/or accommodations not due to a disability or medical condition requiring them are not required by the CACFP. For example, food preferences of children do not require this form. Accommodation of food preferences are the decision of the institution together with the child's parent or guardian.

The institution director does not sign or enter any health or medical information on the form itself. The director might, however, provide attachments to the form to clarify information and instructions for the institution staff to perform a special meal or accommodation.

Conclusion

This module discussed disability and non-disability special dietary needs of participants enrolled in the CACFP. If a participant has a disability that requires special meals and/or accommodations, then the institutions and facilities must comply. For non-disability requests, the institutions and facilities are encouraged, but not required to comply.

Quiz

1. The CACFP Meal Pattern is intended for:
 - A. Participants with normal nutritional needs
 - B. Participants with certain ethnic backgrounds
 - C. Participants with special dietary needs
 - D. All of the above
2. What common foods are most likely to cause an allergic reaction?
 - A. Cow's milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat
 - B. Fruits and vegetables
 - C. Beef, chicken and pork
 - D. All of the above
3. What are some signs that a participant might be having an allergic reaction?
 - A. itching or scratching of the mouth or tongue
 - B. voice become hoarse or squeaky
 - C. words become slurred
 - D. Any or all of the above
4. What are the procedures a facility takes for a participant's food intolerances, food preferences, disability or medical condition?
 - A. Written instructions from the parent are recommended.
 - B. Written instructions should be updated and kept current.
 - C. Centers are encouraged to accommodate reasonable requests, but are not required to do so.
 - D. All of the above.
5. The purpose of the *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations* form is:
 - A. For safety, to protect the nutrition and health of the participant
 - B. To determine if the participant has a disability that requires special meals and/or accommodation.

- C. To document the special meals and/or accommodation being requested by the participant.
- D. All of the above

6. The *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations* form (finish statement):

- A. Is required
- B. Is available for use, but is not required.
- C. Applies only to infants
- D. All of the above

7. For a medical disability that requires special meals and/or accommodations:

- A. A parent signature is required.
- B. A physician signature is required.
- C. A center director signature is required
- D. All of the above

8. For requests for substitutions for fluid cow's milk,

- A. A parent signature is required and is sufficient and acceptable.
- B. A physician signature is required.
- C. A center director signature is required.
- D. All of the above

9. Reasonable special meals and/or accommodation for a participant without a disability, might include, for example:

- A. Substitution of a food for cultural reasons.
- B. Excluding certain foods for religious reasons
- C. Special meals for a child recovering from an illness
- D. All of the above

10. Training about special dietary needs is helpful to:

- A. Assure safety for participants
- B. Protect and provide for participant's nutritional needs
- C. Build successful relationships with parents of participants with special dietary needs
- D. All of the above

Activity

Read and study Supplement B: Care for Children with Food Allergies, *Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children, Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, pages 81-87.

Find and download from the [CACFP website](#): the *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations* form (Revised December 2014).

1. On the *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations* form page 1 fill in items 7, 8 and 9 for an example child participant with a documented food allergy.

See the steps below.

- a) In item 7, mark the appropriate box for a disability. (Hint: Food allergy documented by a physician and with life-threatening consequences is a disability.)
 - b) In item 8, fill in the food allergy (give the name the food) that your example child participant has. (Hint: there are eight foods that most commonly trigger an allergic reaction. Choose one of them as your example.)
 - c) In item 9, write an example special meal or accommodation that could protect a child from the food that you named. (Hint: Study pages 81-87 in Supplement B, to find example special meal or accommodations that can protect a child from various common food allergies.)
 - d) Submit the *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations* form with the information that you added.
2. All institutions provide information to parents pertaining to the institution's operations and services.

This information can be either in a contract, a parent handbook or on an institution's website. All information should include current and correct language about special dietary needs and should include mention of the *Medical Statement to Request Special Meals and/or Accommodations* form, its availability, purpose and use.

Provide the information that your institution gives to parents about special dietary needs. If you do not have any of this information written, please create it now.